

# Oxfam in Vietnam

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## The situation

After years of institutional and economic reform, Vietnam's poverty rate declined rapidly. In 1990, Vietnam was among the world's poorest countries with a GDP per capita of \$98; by 2010, GDP reached \$1,000. Vietnam is now defined as a "lower middle income" country by the World Bank.

Of the 88 million people in Vietnam, 13 million still live in poverty, and many others remain near poor. Poverty reduction is slowing down and inequality is increasing, with persistent deep pockets of poverty. This is especially true for ethnic minorities, who make up 14% of

the population, but account for half of the country's poor people.

Oxfam has worked in Vietnam since 1955, when we made our first humanitarian grant. After several decades supporting humanitarian responses, we started focusing on development work in the late 1980s. We currently work with communities, the government, civil society organisations and other non-governmental organisations to promote equality, development and economic wellbeing through social and economic change.

## In numbers\*...

**400,000**  
total people helped



Photo: Tineke D'haese

## How Oxfam is helping

Oxfam has been working in Vietnam since 1955, when we made our first humanitarian grant. After several decades of supporting humanitarian responses, we started to focus on development work in the late 1980's.

In Vietnam, Oxfam is recognised as one of the leading international non-governmental organisations, especially in rural development, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response, civil society development, ethnic minorities, and women's empowerment.

## Sustainable livelihoods

Our aim is to improve sustainable livelihoods for urban and rural poor people, with a special focus on ethnic minorities and women.



Photo: Danielle Andela

## Strengthening women's economic positions

In Thuan Bac and Bac Ai district in Ninh Thuan province, our project aims to improve market access and promote economic leadership for Raglai women. Raglai people are hesitant to participate in the market, because they are mainly dependent on self-sufficient farming, while engaging in market exchanges could make significant changes to poverty reduction

We work with the Women's Union, community representatives and government authorities to organise training sessions, for Raglai women to improve the quality of their products and sell them on the market. This way, they

can provide a sustainable income for their families, and market dynamics in the area improves.

By 2014, more than 3,000 women in Ninh Thuan are expected to have acquired or improved their trading skills through Oxfam's training programmes. They can gain greater economic status, market participation and social roles within their communities.

We also focus on advocacy activities at provincial and national levels to raise awareness about women's economic leadership and promote this successful model.

**“Right after the training I started off my very own business. I have my own spot on the daily market. I can contribute to cover all of my family's daily costs. Now, I need a loan to scale up my business. I want to say to other women: if I can do it, anybody can! The challenge is equal to all of us. Just be confident!”**

Ms. Dep, who sells fruits in the Thuan Bac district. In 2011, she took part in Oxfam's marketing and calculation training sessions

## Ethnic minorities and fair trade

In the Sapa district of Lao Cai Province, Oxfam works with the local authorities, Women's Union, artisans, Craft Link and CTM Atromercato (the Italian Fair Trade organisation) to improve ethnic minority families' livelihoods.

For example, Oxfam brings together ethnic minority groups and local authorities, supporting both sides to express their needs and different points of view about relevant issues for the communities, to improve their understanding and co-operation.

The aim is to improve access to national and European fair trade markets. We also organise publications and exhibitions to involve ethnic artisans in networks to promote their unique culture, traditions and handicraft.



Photo: Marina Spadafora

## Labour rights

Oxfam works with the Center for Development and Integration (CDI) to empower migrant workers to claim decent working and living conditions in urban areas in Hanoi, Vinh Phuc, Hai Duong and Bac Ninh provinces, by providing access to legal information and aid, capacity building and networking.

Workers learn about existing labour laws and how to claim their rights. Labour unions, Vietnam Lawyers' Association, and local authorities actively participate to promote the implementation of labour rights through CDI work.



Photo: Tineka D'haese

## Natural disasters and climate change

Extreme weather events like severe rainfall and drought, and climate change impacts such as sea level rises, salt intrusions and increased temperatures threaten people's lives – especially poor people's. Oxfam works with local communities and governments to reduce their vulnerability and to adapt to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change.

We help people be better prepared for floods and typhoons. We also respond to emergencies such as in 2009 when Typhoon Ketsana battered the central provinces.

**“This project brought my husband and me four tons of watermelons. This is an increase of 150% yield compared to the old techniques and seeds we used to use.”**

*Vo Thi Truc Ly, who, with her husband Hoang Anh, was among the farmers who piloted new methods of growing watermelons under nylon covers in*



Photo: Bui Thi Minh Hue

## Gender

In principle, Vietnamese men and women have equal rights. In practice, women face gender stereotyping and assigned roles. Key issues include sex-selection at birth, trafficking, and gender based violence.

Oxfam works with the Government and partners to ensure gender is included in all policies, to strengthen a gender legal framework and law enforcement, and to raise awareness on gender equality and domestic violence. We aim for women to gain more control over their lives, increase their economic and political power, and gain more space to express their voices and claim their rights. For instance, Oxfam supports a shelter for women affected by domestic violence, managed by the Centre for Women and Development of the Vietnam Women's Union.

## Explaining the law

Oxfam supports the Quang Ninh Women's Union to inform communities about the Gender Equality Law and law on Domestic Violence Prevention. The Women's Union builds the capacity of its own staff (800 people) to advocate for the laws' implementation, and improves ethnic and poor women's legal knowledge and public awareness, by organising cultural and informative meetings.

In provincial, district and commune

meetings, people are informed exactly what the laws mean for their communities, and how they can put pressure on perpetrators of domestic violence. The Women's Union hands out leaflets, and provides law books and counselling.

We also aim to inspire more than 700 women to become local leaders in the coming years, with training on planning, reporting, how to seek elected office, and leadership skills.